Never believe it's not so

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Glibly declaring game x is like game y only with the zest of z is a lazy way of hastily reviewing a game, getting it submitted to your editor early and heading off down to The Three Broomsticks for a swift Firewhiskey.

With that in mind, Mystical is principally Capcom's Gun.Smoke starring a YTS magician's apprentice and his pet goblin rather than cowboys. That's not a typo, it really *does* have a dot (well sheriff's badge really) between the words Gun and Smoke to distinguish it from the American radio and TV Western drama series of the same name that began its run in 1952. Don't worry, it's Japanese so it doesn't have to make sense.

What's interesting is that Infogrames, the publishers behind Mystical, also published Wanted in 1988; a thinly veiled clone of Gun.Smoke. Two years later it was re-released as the budget title, Outlaw, presumably because it isn't much fun and nobody did. *Want* it that is. No wonder really - running at a million miles an hour with bullets snuffing out your lights in a single shot, it's insanely difficult. If you can get beyond the first few screens at all you realise that there's so little to it death is a welcome release.

So the upshot then is that Mystical can more accurately be considered a spiritual remake of Wanted, only with a sprinkle of sorcery and prettier cartoony graphics. This 'shortcut' isn't getting us to the inn any quicker is it? I may as well start at the beginning.

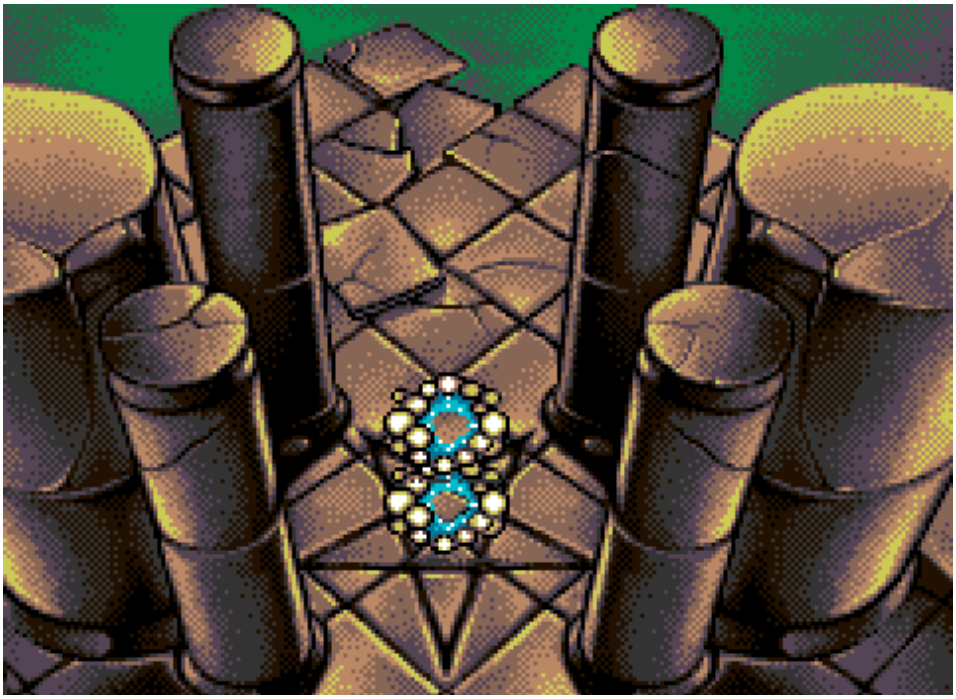
Orchestrating the eccentric mayhem were coder, Fabrice Decroix, graphician, Jocelyn Valais, musician, Stéphane Picq, and designer, Olivier Roge.

Mystical is a vertically scrolling, on-foot, arcade shoot 'em up from the French armadillo people, released in 1990/91 for the Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, DOS, MSX, and ZX Spectrum. It's a lot like certain other stuff, but we won't get into all that. It would take far too long.

As for the plot, it has one, and it rolls a lot like this...

"You're a novice magician at the end of his studies. During a course on the opening of doors at the temple of the Great Wizard, you have clumsily caused the disappearance of all the phials and scrolls that he had so carefully classified over many years.

Needless to say, the rage of the Very Great Wizard is as big as your chances of failing the final exam. Therefore, if you want to obtain your magician's diploma someday, you will have to recover the majority of the scattered phials and scrolls... This will not be easy because they have been thrown into parallel worlds dominated by unscrupulous gods, jealous of the magician's power."



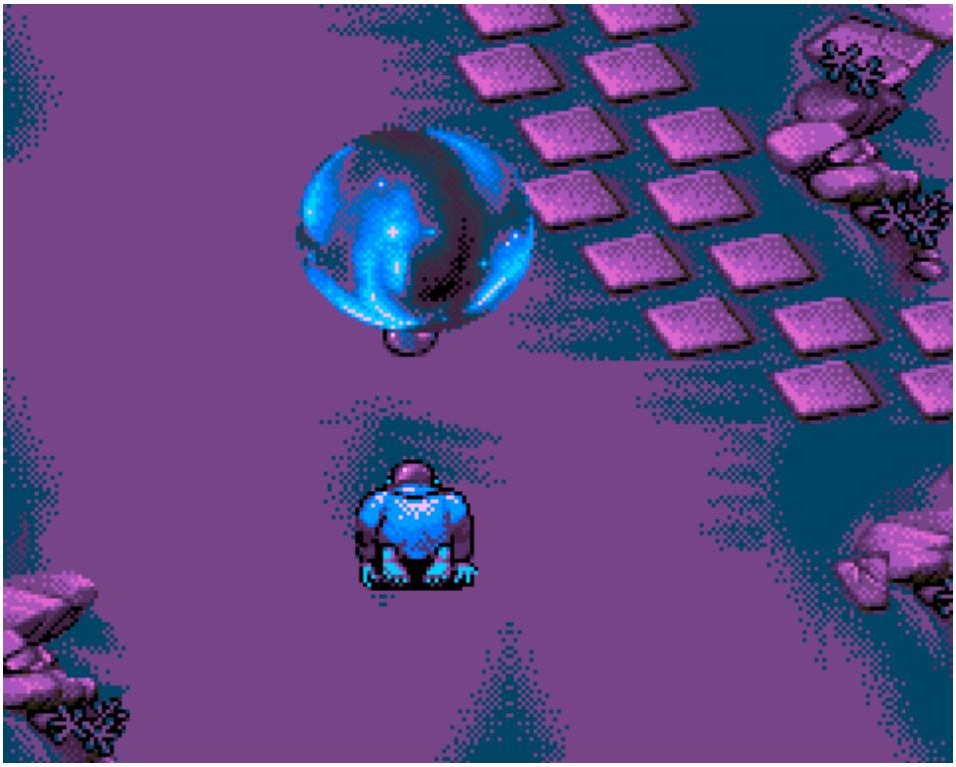
"Despite his intense anger, the Immense Wizard will allow you to use the potions contained in the phials or the magic words inscribed on the scrolls to defend yourself. Then, he will follow you throughout your whole adventure and use his limitless powers to transport you from one world to another and to give you life again should circumstances prove to be fatal.

> Nevertheless, his patience is much more limited than his powers. That is why he will only give you new life twice after which you will be open to his most dreadful punishment."

Collect potions and spells and cast 'em to nuke wacky stray varmints, gotcha. I can't see there being much left to return to the boss once we've finished defending ourselves though. Maybe we can save him the 'in case of emergency tear here' sachets, and he'll at least know they didn't perish in vain. Not that our protagonist is likely to lose much sleep either way; have you seen the smirk he s pulling on the box cover?

Keeping up with the forced scrolling scenery you must sidestep obstacles and eliminate or evade a quirky assemblage of miscreants including deceptively innocent-looking girls carrying baskets of berries, spooky Ents straight out of Lord of the Rings, bible-flinging monks, country bumpkin yokels tooled up with pitchforks, Little Bo Peep who unleashes her deadly sheep, village idiots, hoodies, slithering eels, and all manner of freaky critters and ghouls.

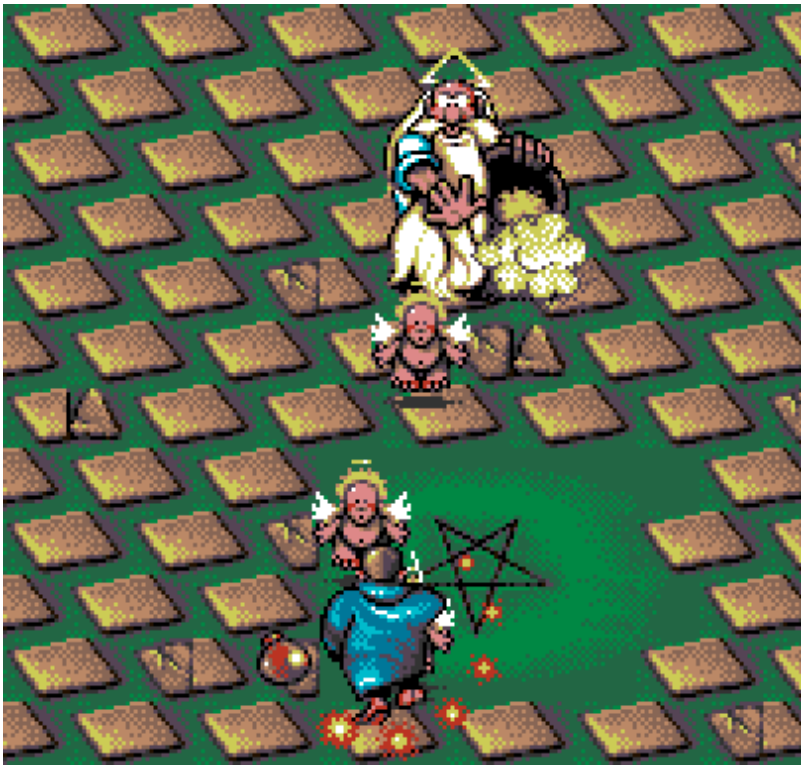
As each stage of the four worlds terminates we must align ourselves with the pentacle from which the Great Wizard projects us into the next world by way of a trainee-absorbing orb, and ultimately into another dimension.



"An uninspired Gauntlet clone." - Gauntlet, *really*?

2 out of 5 stars - Amiga Power (May 1991)

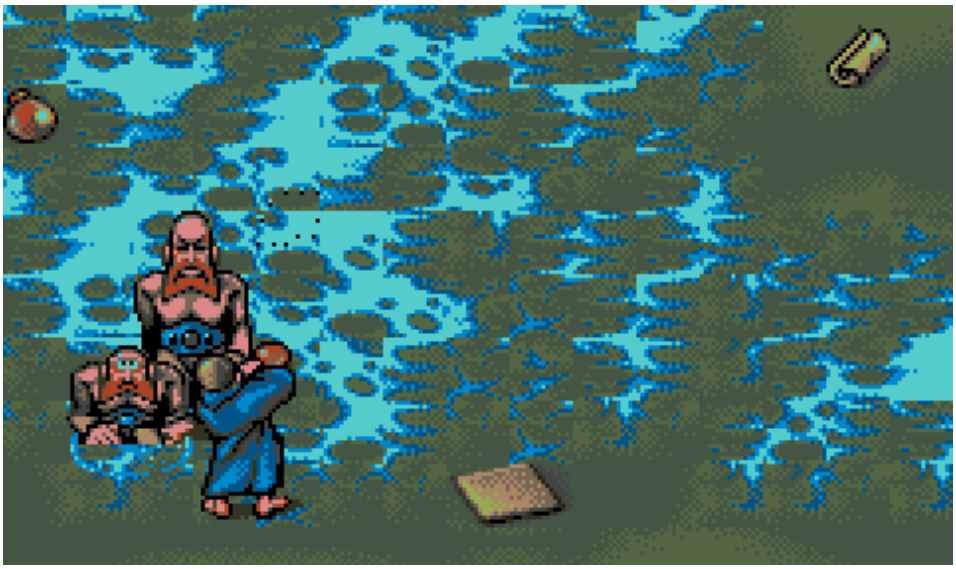
Periodically we face guardian goofballs such as the Methuselah -esque chucker of angelic cherubs, and a grimacing, tunnelling, shuffling, distant blobby relative of Jabba the Hut (who is almost a super-sized rendition of an ordinary foe from the same level). These aren't so much defeated as scared - or perhaps *bored* - into submission, otherwise simply vanishing into the ether without standing on ceremony.



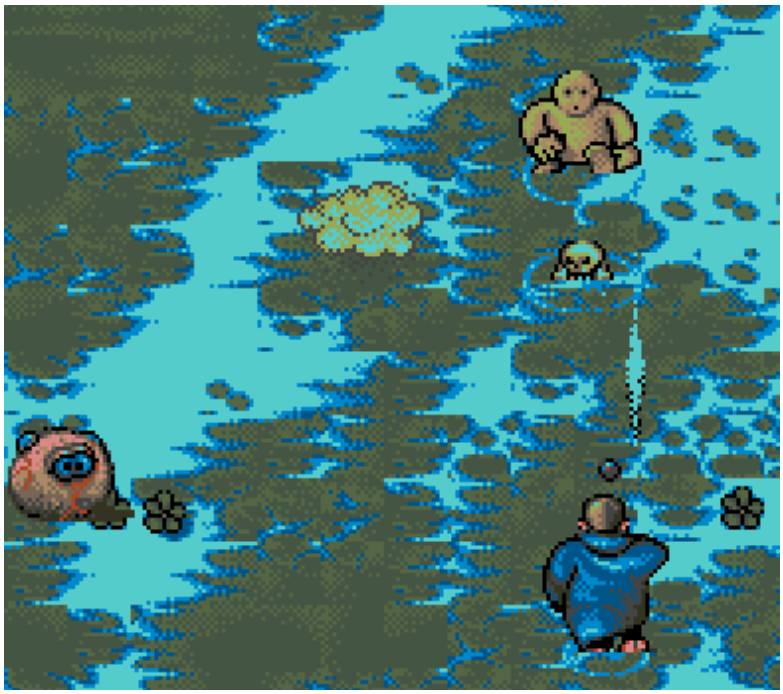
Down in swampland there s a three-headed sea serpent (or are they separate synchronised Nessies?), and finally - back on terra firma - a beaming, jaunty, hip-swinging viking type who nonchalantly hurls a steady barrage of cannonballs at us. Greeted by such an amiable super-villain it would almost be rude not to let ourselves be pulverised to smithereens.

"Each level is basically more of the same: kill everything in your way, and I think this scenario may be the downfall of Mystical."

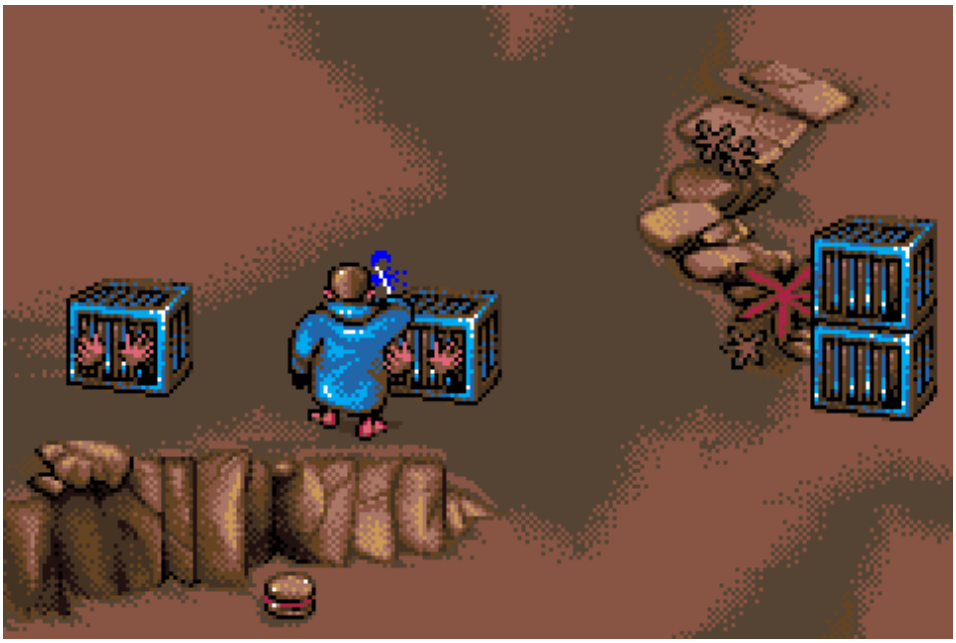
70% - Amiga Action (February 1991)



Altogether there s a menagerie of 24 scrolls and potions to conjure with as you explore the terrain, each either used immediately through automatic activation, or squirreled away in the inventory for later. Browsing through your stockpile is initiated with the space bar, while the number keys or enter triggers their discharge.



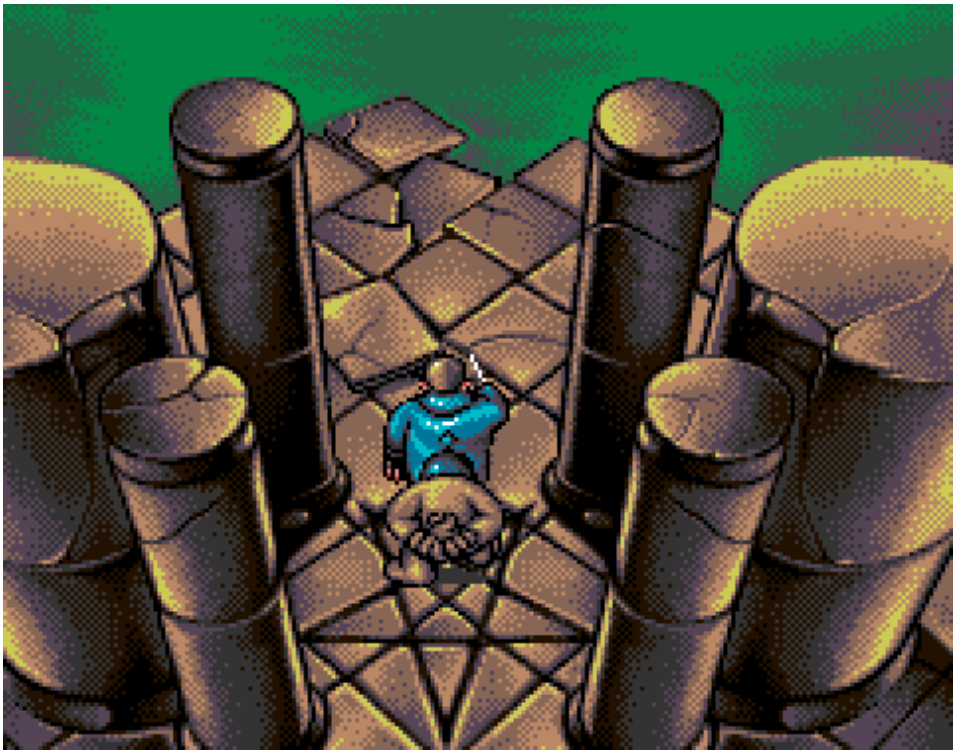
Transforming assailants into frogs or crumbly stone is rendered via the Polymorph or Petrification spells respectively, Fear mind-tricks them into fleeing for their lives, Imprisonment incarcerates everything currently on-screen inside tiny Boglin-like cages, and Earthquake cracks open fissures in the ground, swallowing all enemies in the vicinity.



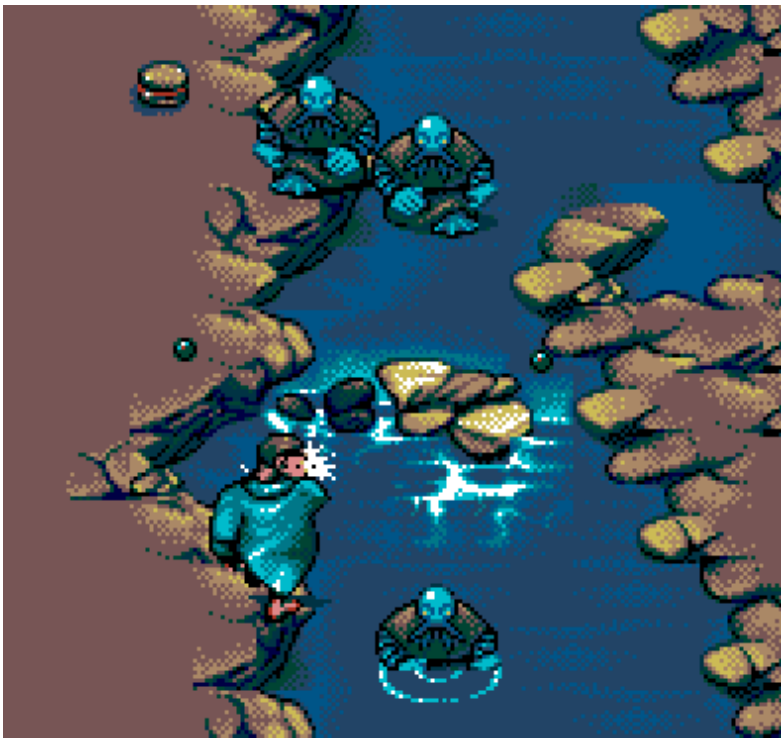
Deep breaths. Other options include homing swords, projectile multipliers, sprite-replicating doppelgangers, batarangs, snowmanisers, and a genie flunky who shadows us propelling three-way boulders.

"Slick, eye-catching and playable, but also dull, repetitive and highly switch-offable. Less than essential, basically."

50% - Amiga Power (March 1992)



Energy can be restored by eating hamburgers, although the most effective power-up you can muster is a friend to take charge of player two. Rather than a duplicate of yourself with a tweaked wardrobe, they assume the role of Golem (not *that* one, he s *Gollum*), a meat-headed brute who stomps on opponents to take them out of the equation.



He's a bit of a 'short straw' entity that can be assigned to a younger brother who won't argue because you could just sit on him to stifle his griping. Dumb wingman, Golem, can't cast spells and must burrow beneath the ground to replenish his health whenever his indicator drops below 10 units. It's all a bit 'Upstairs, Downstairs' really; that's the magic circle aristocracy for you I suppose.

> "Nice graphics and digitised sound, but the gameplay is thin on the ground."
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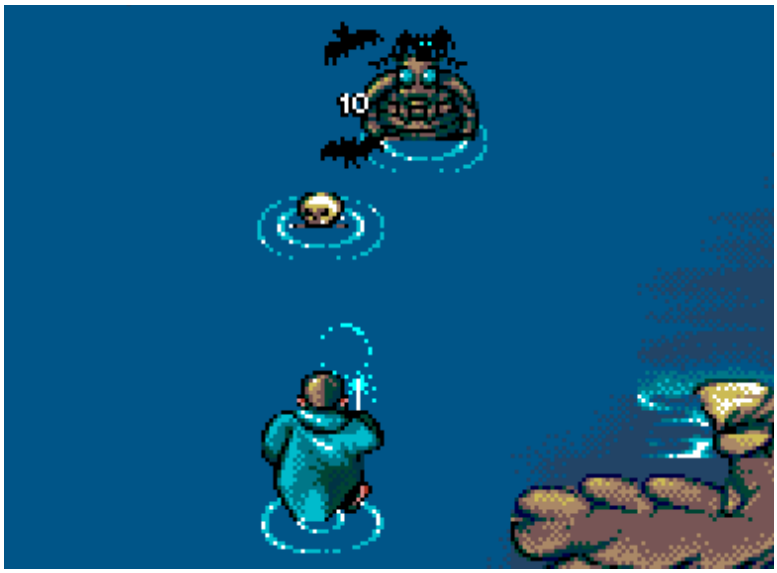
> **45% - Amiga Action (March 1992)**



Mystical doesn't quite end with the defeat of the potion-pilfering final boss. You fight a few more of his lackeys for good measure before it meekly gives up the ghost, dumping you at the high score table. At least the Spectrum iteration has the courtesy to say congratulations. As feeble Amiga game culminations go it's right up there with the likes of Xenon II s "don t forget to turn off your set". I'm not even sure if entirely failing to include a finale *counts* as a genuine conclusion. Perhaps the coder had a penchant for Firewhisky too.

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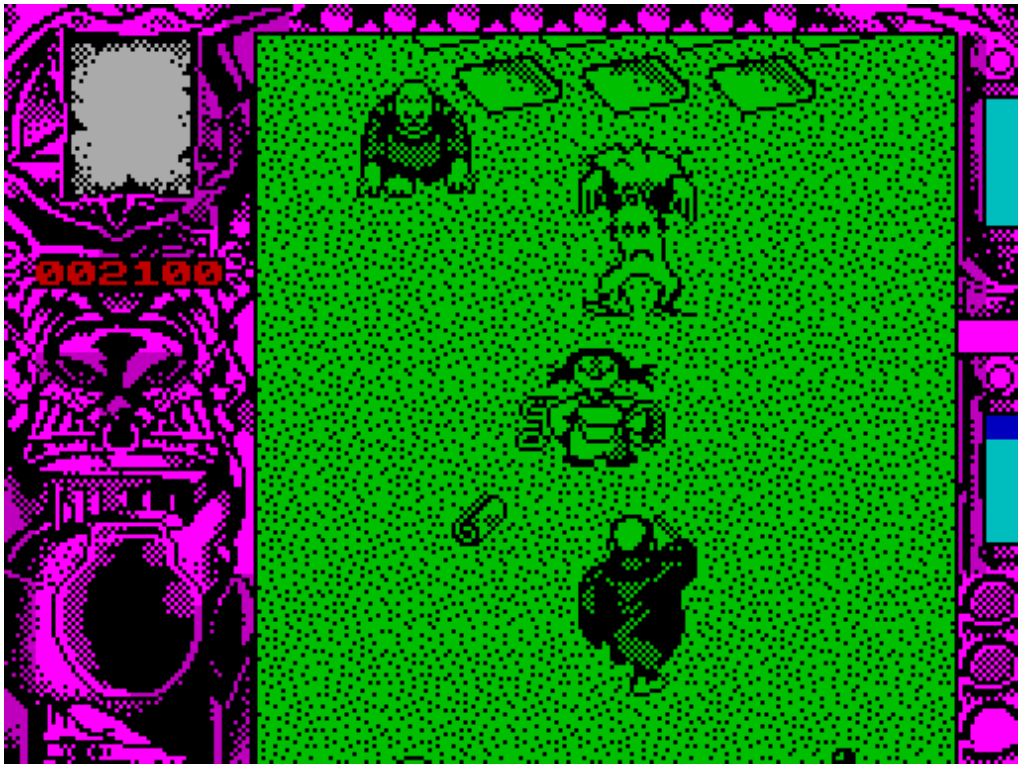
002100

"A hybrid of a shoot-em-up and an animated adventure quest. Too slow for blasting and too shallow for questing."

60% - Amiga Format (March 1992)

An anticlimax customarily dictates evidence of anticipation, and personally I felt nothing of the sort. Even the name is forgettably bland. By French standards, it doesn't ride especially high on the mitigating weirdometre so it s not squirming off the hook that easily. A snoozefest of a game, conspicuous only for supplanting the more typical shmup space ship with a gurning necromancer-wannabe sproglet. Top marks for the sparkly gold box inner though. Maybe you *can* polish a...